

Message Text

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ACTION OPR-02

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00

USIE-00 A-01 SY-05 OC-06 CCO-00 PER-01 SCS-03 SCA-01

CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 DHA-02 SCCT-01 IO-13 /098 W

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O P 141430Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8589

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL STUTTGART PRIORITY

DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

USCINCEUR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4594

STUTTGART FOR ELG

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ASEC, ATRN, SY

SUBJECT: TRIP REPORT: JULY 14 BEIRUT-DAMASCUS CONVOY

1. FOLLOWING REPORT PREPARED BY CONVOY LEADER SIZER.
ROAD CONVOY JULY 14 REACHED DAMASCUS 1500 LOCAL AFTER
UNEVENTFUL TRIP OF SLIGHTLY OVER SEVEN HOURS. ROUTE WAS
SIDON-NABATIYAH-MARJAYOUN-MASNAA. NO SECURITY PROBLEMS
ENCOUNTERED EN ROUTE, AS ALL ROADBLOCKS EITHER WAVED US
THROUGH OR GAVE PERFUNCTORY CHECK. ONLY ROADBLOCK THAT
ASKED FOR PASSPORTS WAS ONE OF LAST LAA POINTS BEYOND
MARJAYOUN. ROADBLOCKS WERE EITHER PALESTINIAN OR LAA
UNTIL JUST SOUTH OF RACHAYA. AFTER THAT SYRIAN ROADBLOCKS
STARTED.

2. PALESTINIAN ESCORT STAYED WITH US UNTIL AFTER WE
CROSSED LITANI AND HEADED UP OTHER SIDE OF GORGE TOWARD
MARJAYOUN. WE WERE MET BY COL. MUNDY FROM AMEMBASSY
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DAMASCUS AT MAJOR LAA ROADBLOCK ON WESTERN SIDE OF

MARJAYOUN AND PROCEEDED THROUGH TOWN WITHOUT INCIDENT.
CONTINUED WITH NO ESCORT (OTHER THAN MUNDY) TO DAMASCUS.

3. CLOSEST THING TO INCIDENT ON ENTIRE TRIP WAS FIFTEEN-MINUTE STOP JUST BEYOND MARJAYOUN WHILE ONE OF TAXIS CARRYING BRITISH PERSONNEL CHANGED A FLAT TIRE. ROADS WERE HEAVILY POTHOLED AND ROUTE PUNCTURE-PRONE.

4. HASSLE AND DELAY AT BORDER (ONE HOUR) WERE WEARING BUT SEEMED NO MORE THAN EXPECTED, GIVEN LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF LEBANESE TRYING TO CROSS BORDER AT SAME TIME. THERE WAS NO CHECK AT LEBANESE STATION, BUT SYRIAN IMMIGRATION INSISTED ON FULL TREATMENT. THEY WERE CORDIAL AND GAVE US SEMI-PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT AS WE WAVED DIPLOMATIC PASSPORTS. COL. MUNDY LED US BY SYRIAN CUSTOMS, WHICH WE THUS NEATLY FINESSED.

5. ZAHRANI REFINERY, WHICH WE PASSED ABOUT 0930 HOURS, WAS STILL SMOKING BUT FIRES APPEARED UNDER CONTROL. DAMAGE LOOKED BY NO MEANS TOTAL, AS SEVERAL STORAGE TANKS IN GROUP ON COAST SEEMED INTACT AND ENTIRE GROUP ON HILL ABOVE SEEMED UNTOUCHED, AT LEAST AS SEEN FROM ROAD. ON SAME SUBJECT, AS WE CROSSED LITANI WE NOTED A TANKER TRUCK ("TOTAL" TRADEMARK), HEADING IN OPPOSITE DIRECTION TOWARD NABATIYAH, ESCORTED BY LAA TRUCK CARRYING MEN WITH GUNS AT READY.

6. ALL IN ALL, TRIP WAS TIRING BUT CALM. WE WERE STRUCK BY EXTENT TO WHICH NORMAL DAILY LIFE CONTINUES IN SIDON, NABATIYAH, MARJAYOUN, ETC., DESPITE THREAT OF WARFARE. (DAMOUR, HOWEVER, LOOKED GHOSTLY.) SIZE OF CONVOY WAS ABOUT RIGHT, CONSIDERING DIFFICULTY OF KEEPING VEHICLES TOGETHER (THE MAJOR PREOCCUPATION THROUGHOUT) BALANCED AGAINST "VISIBILITY" OF INTERNATIONAL CONVOY COMMANDING SPECIAL TREATMENT AT ROADBLOCK.
MURPHY

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